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National Education as a 'civics' literacy in a globalized world: The challenges facing Education in Singapore

Mary Ryan - Queensland University of Technology

Tony Rossi - The University of Queensland

Introduction

The leadership in many countries around the world has decided that within their education systems, a *National Education* agenda should be promoted (Osler and Vincent, 2002). This appears to have a multiple agenda – it serves as a form of 'civics education' whereby the constitutional role of government is discussed and the sense of 'civic responsibility' promoted, albeit in fairly general terms. Osler and Vincent (2002) allude to other agendas which appear to be related to inculcating a sense of National Identity and a sense of 'citizenship' which has to do with pride in nation-state, commitment to the national cause, and developing a general sense of patriotism, belonging (see Davidson, 1994) and national unity across within-border cultures. From time to time, this can degenerate into a level of flag waving that Billig (1996) has labeled *Banal Nationalism*. What most of these agendas seem to be built upon is an unproblematic notion of identity and the belief that there either is, or can only be, one identity even though the academic literature is replete with counter arguments (see Davidson, 1994; Dudley, Robison and Taylor, 1999). Hence contemporary research in sociology and social psychology seems to suggest that this is a flawed assumption. This is so because no matter how protective and paternalistic governments try to be, the power of globalisation to transcend national boundaries means that most citizens of most developed nations have the capacity to be global citizens and this especially applies to the younger members of communities who are adept in the uses of techno and cyber literacies which give them unparalleled access to other worlds (Luke & Luke, 2001). So not only are young people subject to the vagaries of globalized finance markets and the degree of free trade, making all types of consumer products available – what Habermas (1985) calls the *colonization of the lifeworld*, they are also subject to the globalizing effects of popular culture, which is easily available through large multi-media transnational companies. In referring to these phenomena, Matthews (2000) uses the terms 'material supermarket' indicating the flood of products available far from their point of origin and 'cultural supermarket' representing the free flow of information, ideas and identities. Both have existed in some form throughout the history of humankind. The cultural supermarket however has experienced explosive and exponential growth much more recently. Matthews argues that "people throughout the affluent, mass-mediated world today may be as molded by the material and cultural supermarkets as by the state" (p.9). Much, but by no means all of this popular culture available though the cultural supermarket is of western origin.

Jenkins (2004) however suggests that global convergences are creating what he calls 'a new pop cosmopolitanism' (p. 117). By this he means that trans-cultural flows are multi-directional and lead to new forms of 'global consciousness and cultural competency' (p. 117). Examples of trans-cultural flows which do not emanate from the west, include Bhangra music from India, Hong Kong action movies, and Japanese anime. Singapore is therefore better described as a 'pastiche' (Wee, 2000) where economic and cultural progress has used an 'Asianised' neo-liberal agenda with powerful influences from Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan in particular, to attempt to forge both its identity as a nation state and its place in the world as a major economic player. Chua and Yeo (2003) for example refer to a flourishing Singapore film culture but one that has to operate from the margins given the role of critique it has assumed and the level of actual or implied government surveillance it attracts. None the less, it demonstrates that no matter how 'westernised' Singapore has become, it has become so on its own terms (see Wee, 2000).

As we alluded to earlier, this means then, that through the power of electronic media, vast numbers of young people throughout the developed world have the potential to be global citizens, and don't think for one minute that the young people on this planet are duped into this - they invest, very heavily, in popular culture and no matter where they are, embrace it wholeheartedly (Luke, 1997). This means that, as Luke (2002) has said, the master pedagogues are no longer teachers in schools but the likes of Disney, Nokia, Microsoft, CNN, MTV. The question facing Singapore is how can teachers make National Education – the Singaporean version of civics education, relevant to young people in schools in what Giddens (2000) argues is an increasingly globalised world which is clearly populated by globalised identities?

This thing called globalisation

Globalisation is not necessarily new. It has been argued that an early example of globalisation was the spread of the Roman Empire and Robertson and Inglis (2004) talk about 'globality' and 'global consciousness' as being traceable to Ancient Mediterranean history. Their point here is that whilst the acceleration of globalization is more recent, the 'presentism' apparent in accounts of globalization is misplaced. There are of course a myriad of other similar examples of despots with global dominance aspirations. Elsewhere, Robertson (1992) prefers to talk about 'internationalisation', which he claims is a more accurate description of what is happening. By this he means that trade, cultural exchange, labour and money can be moved across national borders with considerable ease. His description is accurate though to some extent apolitical. Globalisation attracts a far more emotive and political response as suggested by anti-globalisation demonstrations worldwide. Mittelman (2004) for example describes how protests against World Trade Organisation policy erupted with the Battle of Seattle in 1999 which was followed by protests in Washington, Prague, Melbourne New York and parts of Asia among others. These high profile protests which have been labeled as being 'anti-globalisation' according to Mittelman (2004) fail to acknowledge the complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Mittelman (2004) prefers the concept of resistance because in his view, *anti*-globalisation suggests a negation of the whole principle of a globalised world with no regard for what might be positive aspects such as cultural cosmopolitanism, intellectual collaboration and mutual benefit trade. Singer (2002) also argues that the

anti-globalistion position is a flawed argument as it cannot really be demonstrated with any clarity that some groups are worse or better off as a consequence of globalization.

An unexpected form of resistance has emerged in Singapore, not so much against global networks and the information society rather this form of resistance has been facilitated by these things. Ho, Baber and Khondker (2002) describe Singapore's move to an 'Intelligent Island' through ever expanding IT networks has actually created a new 'public space' where none had really existed before. The research shows the existence (and one assumes tolerance) of a broad range of web sites which do not appear to fit with the regulatory forms of government in Singapore as described for example by Chua & Yeo (2003). This form of resistance perhaps illustrates the potential democratizing power of a 'wired society'

Globalisation then appears to be representative of a massive change in human activity on a scale which is unprecedented in human history (see Giddens, 2000). Given this, globalisation could be about sameness and uniformity (see Corson, 2000). Just as convincingly, globalisation could be about hybridity and combining all that is 'good' in human endeavour. The only thing that the research and scholarly literature seems to agree about is that it is a phenomenon that *is* happening and that the *rate* at which it will continue to happen will be exponential. There is great *disagreement* however about when it started, what is driving it, who stands to gain and who stands to lose. As the earlier examples indicate, these things depend largely on the position one takes within the discourse. Given that there are different positions within the discourse of globalisation then, definitions of the phenomenon are likely to be problematic (Singer 2002, Urry, 2003).

The dramatic spread (and acceptance) of this, largely through powerful technologies of communication, means that not only is business conducted in certain ways, but the ways of business have come to be the ways of social life more generally. Inevitably, there is some dispute as to the extent of globalisation and some regard the claim of the demise of the nation state as premature. For example Smith (1992) when discussing the European Union talked about what he chose to call habitual communities – such communities he felt were resistant to the idea of the disappearance of the Nation State. Similarly Soysal (2002) and Cederman (2000) argue that the Nation State is a durable concept but one which need not limit broader communication and other global flows such as consumer goods, knowledge, labour, and capital which may have mutual benefit. However, Weinstein (1997) claims that:

> With a powerful boost from the media and multi-national corporations, a single world culture has taken on a life of its own in fewer than three decades; and it increasingly is a global system rather than simply European or American. The old colonial-based core-periphery distinctions may still hold, but diffusion is no longer bound by space or time. Styles that are prevalent in any part of the world today can be instantaneously demonstrated anywhere else, with TV images and advertising campaigns providing a potent impetus toward adoption. (p.107)

The notion of globalization also infers that boundaries either real, understood or virtual, will simply disappear as we move into what is euphemistically called the 'global village' (see McLuhan, 1964). Work from the field of social geography does not *necessarily* support this and there is a belief in some quarters that the Nation state will remain for some time. Soysal's (2002) analysis of the European Union for example demonstrates that in spite of the ties that bind Europe, there is no European *demos* or *polity* that would either encourage or support the eradication of the Nation State. Soysal's (2002) argument is that whatever European identity is, it is not on course to replace the Nation State, rather European identity is a way of re-interpreting the idea of 'nation'.

A distinguishing feature of the inexorable move towards globalised communities is what Cho (1998) refers to as the 'convergence' of space and time (see also Giddens, 1991 and Gergen 1991), which as he says has been ushered in by a rapidly advancing and converging technology. We alluded to this earlier. More illuminative however is Castells' (2004, 1997) work. He prefers the term 'network society' (see also Selwyn, 2003) and he suggests that such a society will be the dominant social structure in the Information Age. It is, he suggests, organized around "new forms of time and space: timeless time and the space of flows. He goes on to claim that "[T]hese are dominant forms, and not the forms in which most people live, but through their domination, they affect everybody" (2004, p.145). Hence the communication technologies now available have created timeless time in which immediacy of communication both compresses human activity to seconds and eliminates the sequencing of time. Urry (2003) also uses the concept of networks describing postmodern times as a network with multiple 'nodes' of connection which are dependent on the size of the network. However he further suggests that networks overlay each other which have led to his preferred term of global complexity where participation in many networks at the same time is not only possible but likely. Selwyn (2003) suggests that such networks have ushered in a new breed of technological innovation, a more mobile variety including palmtop computers and mobile telephones, that 'offer quicker and easier access to information and communication on an anywhere, anytime basis' (p. 131). Given Singapore's push towards ever-expanding IT networks (Ho, Baber and Khondker, 2002) it would not be surprising to find that Singaporean youth have embraced such technologies, which give them immediate access to worlds beyond everyday life.

Giddens (1991) has also considered relationships of space and time and suggests that their conflation through technologically advanced forms of communication results in what he calls *mediating experiences* for humans. By this he means that an occurrence which though geographically may be a significant distance away (half a world for example) may still have an impact and an influence on persons. So we may all be mindful of land degradation going on in certain parts of the world and the possible impact it could have on a much wider scale. Similarly, when India and Pakistan were testing nuclear weapons, the potential for catastrophe was felt around the world not just in the Asian sub-continent.

The connection to National Education in Singapore

On the face of it, one might wonder what this has to do with National Education in Singapore. It is apparent that the government machine in Singapore sought to develop notions of civic pride and citizenship (even though this remains ill-defined) and with a definite agenda of what it calls *nation-building* and a glimpse of the Ministry of Education website indicates that the objectives of National Education are to develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future. National Education was made public as an idea in September 1996 when at a Teachers' Day Rally Prime Minister Goh spoke of the need for such a program in Singapore schools (Wee, 2000). Goh made the case that the principles of 'nationhood', meritocracy and multiracialism needed to be re-discovered since according to a newspaper poll the awareness of Singapore's development and history since the end of the Second World War was particularly weak. Wee (2000) suggests that an Asian regional identity was being replaced by political edict with a nationalist agenda. At the heart of this agenda suggests Wee, was the political desire to develop "a multicultural and historicized sense of nationhood" (p.140), mixed with the government's "established ideology of economic survival" (p.140). Hence as Wee (2000) describes, whilst there was a commitment to enshrine the sense of National identity across the curriculum through National Education there was no interest in scaring away "free floating capital" (p.140).

Koh (2004) points out that National Education was part of a broader reform which came under the banner of *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* which he suggests was the beginning of a reform which sought to re-align "educational change in response to the trajectories of (global) economic conditions, concomitantly framed by (local) sociopolitical and cultural ideological needs" (p.336). This is according to Koh (2004) an act of tactical globalisation but goes further to suggest it is a policy "to govern, discipline and regulate the Singaporean habitus" (p.336) When talking specifically about National Education, Koh (2004) argues that it is:

> a parochial vision that focuses on the local. In an era of globalisation where identities are up for grabs, maintaining an organic or essentialised identity will be increasingly difficult. A hybrid culture and hybridized identities are the new cultural formations in new times. (p.338)

Moreover, Koh (2004) emphasizes the increasing complexities of Singapore's ethnoscape National Education is a contradiction to the global flow of culture which features difference and diversity (see also Chun, 1996 and Ang 2001). As Koh (2004) argues a curriculum which takes difference and diversity as its pedagogical focus "will dislodge the myopic and inward looking construction of a national (local) identity (p.341).

If we return to the main objectives of National Education; to develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future, four sub-objectives are listed to bring these about. They are as follows:

- By fostering a sense of identity, pride and self-respect as Singaporeans
- By knowing the Singapore story … how it became a nation against the odds

- By understanding Singapore's unique challenges, which separate it from other nations
- By instilling the core values of the Singaporean way of life, and the will to prevail, that ensure continued success and well being.

These, in and of themselves are not at all inappropriate. In fact most countries in the world with a citizenship education program might reasonably be expected to identify similar goals and objectives. This is perhaps the point of the link to globalisation. Many of the issues facing Singapore are far from unique. As with all countries there is a unique history, and the government believes that it must 'instill' this history – mainly because in the case of Singapore many of the teachers in schools, never mind the children, are too young to remember the birth of the nation. What we know is that while principles of nationhood are important in Singapore, the youth of this current era want to invest in alternative visions of the world driven by other literacies or multiliteracies which are in tune with *their* world, *their* time and *their* interests. This is the real challenge for a National Education agenda in Singapore.

Multiliteracies, global citizens and global identities

In 1996, the New London Group met to discuss the emerging literacy needs for a new world. They argued that the young people of today operate within what they came to call 'multiliteracies' – a complex set of communication media involving many different kinds of text including video, CD, truncated language forms used in computer speak, SMS/MMS communication, alternative verbal communication with hybrid words and sentences, gestural communication, audio literacies and more. These codes of communication were in keeping, the group suggested, with the emerging global identities of the youth in a post modern world of discontinuity (Limerick, Cunnington & Crowther 1998). What this means is that the young people within our communities across the developed world (and also we suspect in the under-developed world) relate to a range of cultural texts and icons that are far removed from the everyday routines of schooling. Of course children attend school and can show that they participate willingly in the habitual practices of schooling (Giddens, 1991) but their multiple identities span a globe that is within relatively easy reach for them. As Luke (1997) suggests, they invest heavily in this non-school world and it involves fashion, music, sport and TV fantasy - a media fest of alternatives. Even in Singapore where education is highly valued for what it can 'provide' (rather than the inherent value of education itself) and where kaisuism (the fear of losing or failing) rules supreme, young people are not so much disengaged from school but are able to separate it from their real interests. Recently one of us was working with a group of early to mid career teachers and they all shared this view – Singapore children they said, exist in a cyber world of their own and often of their own making. Whilst we do not suggest that such anecdotal evidence can be broadly accepted across all cases, it does however tell a brief but important tale. In addition one only needs to look around when traveling on public transport systems in Singapore, to note the abundance of western culture in the lives of its passengers. Mothers sit reading popular western magazines, whilst their children are dressed in promotional sports clothes from the UK or America. Teenagers are dressed in ways that emulate western hip culture, and listen to pop music from the world music charts which includes other parts of Asia, (notably

Taiwan and Korea) on portable CD walkmans or more likely MP3 players. It seems that National Education in Singapore has a mountain to climb against this backdrop. This is not to suggest that it is not important or worthwhile – but it does suggest that for the attention of young Singaporeans, it is up against some pretty stiff opposition.

Work in the field of multiliteracies can be a useful guide here. The work of the New London Group suggested that in terms of pedagogy a rethink is required. They suggested that pedagogy is a complex arrangement of four factors that the group outlines as follows:

- *Situated Practice* based on the very world(s) in which the learners exist and how they both have their experiences designed for them and how they design them themselves;

- *Overt Instruction* – a means by which students shape for themselves, with explicit intervention by 'experts' (including teachers and community members) "an explicit meta-language of Design" (see New London Group, 2000, p. 31);

- *Critical Framing* – this relates to meanings associated with the social context of learners and the ways in which they analyze and/or challenge dominant ideologies; and

- *Transformed Practice* where students are able to transfer their designs of meaning from one situation to another, and apply their knowledge to new situations.

The New London Group (2000) is specific about these factors having no hierarchy and neither are there stages. This is not a pedagogic platform that focuses on teachers and what they do, instead there is a real acknowledgement of students as a community of learners, and an emphasis on *their* world views and language expression, *their* sense of belonging, and their ability to engage with texts and knowledge using the resources available to them. Students are active participants and problem-solvers as they take responsibility for their learning (Healy, 2004; Kalantzis & Cope, 2004).

Kalantzis and Cope (2004, pp. 40-42) explicate four knowledge processes that define ways of thinking, learning and acting within a multiliteracies framework. These are: **experiencing** (the known and the new), **conceptualizing** (by identifying and theorizing), **analyzing** (functionally and critically) and **applying** (appropriately and creatively).

So what is really meant by all this and how does it relate to the pedagogy of National Education in Singapore. It is generally acknowledged that what is being taught cannot be separated from how it is being taught (see Lusted, 1986, Shulman, 1986, 1987). The multiliteracies project provides us with a sense that what we do in schools inherently involves literacy of one kind or another. It makes sense therefore to consider National Education as a literacy or set of literacies which frame(s) the essence of what it is trying to achieve. An additional layer of complexity is the position of National Education as a political device for a Nation State and its potential to contribute to a global education effort. If we add to this the diversity of school students in Singapore and the diverse

identities they have, we have what Cope and Kalantzis (2000), refer to as 'productive diversity'. Whilst this diversity adds a dimension of complexity, Cope and Kalantzis argue that it provides an excellent point to develop meaningful pedagogy and the National Education agenda would be an ideal vehicle for this.

Drawing on The Multiliteracies Pedagogy to frame National Education in Singapore

Situated Practice

This part of pedagogy is about being immersed in what the New London Group (2000) calls 'meaningful practices'. This, the groups says, takes place "within a community of learners who are capable of playing multiple and different roles based on their backgrounds and experiences" (p.33). This means that the identities of learners must be a feature of this part of pedagogy as identity is part of the 'situatedness'. In this aspect of a multiliteracies pedagogy, learners may become, at various times, 'the expert' in classroom discussions or activities, based on their prior knowledge *(experiencing the known)*, and at other times will experience texts and concepts with which they are unfamiliar *(experiencing the new)*. Teachers may feel threatened as they 'lose control' of some classroom situations as they themselves *experience the new*, however both teachers and students in a multiliteracies classroom are seen as learners.

Overt Instruction

This is little to do with drills and transmission, 'imparting knowledge' or rote memorization – often commonly used language for teaching. Rather it is about scaffolding learning activities to enable learners to identify new information, concepts and strategies *(conceptualising by identifying)*, which should focus on their experiences within their communities. It is a far more collaborative effort than the commonly held approaches to teaching of expert to novice knowledge transmission. Such an approach necessarily requires the use of meta-languages – the operative communication forms used commonly by learners and enabling them to draw together knowledge and information *(conceptualise by theorizing)*. Explicit teaching by 'experts' or mentors from both within and outside the classroom, can guide the learner to analyse models and examples of text, to identify design elements *(analysing functionally)* necessary to construct new meanings and gain new understandings to which they may never otherwise have access.

Critical Framing

Critical Framing is aimed at helping learners frame their developing mastery gained within the situated practice in social, political, ideological, historical and value-centred contexts. Developing mastery is a social practice that does not occur in a vacuum. Students must therefore be able to make sense of what they are learning in broader contexts, and should be encouraged to interrogate and problematize text to situate it within broader agendas *(analyzing critically)*. We would argue that this is crucial for a program in National Education. Instilling national values and identity is simply not enough, this must occur against a backdrop of a globalizing world. This does not demean National Education, in fact we would argue that it makes it a far stronger program because children can begin to understand the place of the Nation State (in this case Singapore) within the complex global community. The achievements and successes of Nation States can then be assessed more easily and perhaps provide lessons for others. National Education as a global education within this pedagogical framework can provide

for Singaporean children a far broader view of the civic responsibilities they have as citizens.

Transformed Practice

As the New London Group says "We always need to return to where we began, to Situated Practice, but now as re-practice, where theory becomes reflective practice" (p.35). Hence the pedagogical 'work' that has taken place must be able to take students to a level where they can re-visit their prior experiences and embed new practices appropriately within their knowledge systems *(applying appropriately)*. This process of designing new meanings through interaction with new texts or other people, means that the designs of meaning that students have available to them to make sense of their world, grows with every new interaction, and they can begin to apply this knowledge in new and interesting ways *(applying creatively)*. This transforming of meaning or re-designing then provides the opportunity for students to re-assess their previous positions or what Giddens (1991) calls a re-ordering of narratives. At first glance this might seem to suggest that National Education is there to be challenged and in a sense it is, not for what it is but possibly for what it isn't. Students can place National Education within the broader contexts of which they are a part. Their global identities can be a conduit to place National Education within a broader framework of civics education. Hence the global identities need not be a threat to National Education rather they can connect Singapore to the world in ways that are other than economic. A multiliteracies approach then could enable Singaporean teachers to weave National Education into their classes as a discourse of civic pride and responsibility but also as a global civic education relevant to a 'New World'.

The Multiliteracies Project it is argued "aims to develop a pluralistic educational response to trends in the economic, civic and personal spheres of life which impact on meaning-making and therefore literacy" (Lo Bianco, 2000, p. 101). As Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997) argue, to achieve this it is necessary to find ways to ensure that the children of the world have the competencies in the multiple ways required to make such meaning. Figueroa (2000) argues that all present day societies must be regarded as plural. This places Singapore in a fascinating position. Its unique history and almost unprecedented growth from a third to first world Nation State is immersed in a pluralistic society. There may be issues related to the equity within the society but what is certain is that this development has occurred in peace (admittedly under surveillance) and for the most part is underpinned by pluralist representation. Singapore could almost be regarded as a microcosm of the global village. As Osler and Vincent (2002) suggest "Pluralism does not imply that all people necessarily have equal status or power within a society, but it does assume that, as human beings, they are of equal worth" (p.25). What National Education in Singapore can show is how this has been achieved and how aspects of it can be illustrative in a global community. However, what needs to be resolved is the intellectual tension between the pluralism in Singapore and the idea that there can only be one Singaporean identity as is implied in most ministerial statements and documents. Not only is there ethnic diversity in Singapore but as we have explored here, there are developing global identities that the National Education agenda must accommodate. The global stage is a way of achieving this however it will require some changes. This is

because National Education faces the same challenges as the Multiliteracies Project itself and that is "to develop a theory of communication and meaning making for a radically changing world" (Lo Bianco, 2000, p.101). Since we are arguing that National Education is a form of literacy the necessity to achieve this is evermore important.

National Education as Global Education

Another way of thinking about National Education would be to consider it as a form of global education. This does not mean that the essential qualities need to be distilled down to meaningless statements. Rather, it means connecting National Education to a wider globalized world within a global education effort. For this, the human rights dimensions of National Education can be made more explicit and with greater connections to a socially just world. Singapore, it is argued, is among the most globalized countries in the world (Brown, 2000). It is so, because its drive to nationhood has had to rely in its unique history as a hub for South East Asia and on its greatest and some would say only resource, its people. This has allowed Singapore to be a centre of foreign investment and manufacturing. This places Singapore on a world stage and perhaps therefore its National Education agenda should not only promote civic pride and resoluteness but also show Singapore as part of the global village (McLuhan, 1964). Moreover Held (1996) suggests that today we live in what he calls (throughout his text) *communities of fate* which clearly overlap and for which national territory is no barrier. Hence there is general acceptance of the world as an *interdependent* place. In this regard then, Held (1996) calls for a *cosmopolitan democracy*. In doing so he suggests that the nation state is not the best unit of democracy for a globalised world. Rather, he argues, that the essence of democracy should be woven into regional and global institutions which co-exist alongside Nation States. This is perhaps a more sustainable position than the Nation State view of democracy and citizenship which tends to encourage an inward looking citizenry which in some cases degenerates into xenophobia.

It is important that National Education against this global backdrop does not lose sight of many of the things that has allowed Singapore to be successful; reward for effort based on merit, a commitment to hard work, a strong defence and civic pride. These though, need not disappear in the face of a commitment to regional and global overlapping communities. In fact, the essence of the Singapore success story and the lessons from which it has drawn (colonial history, geographic vulnerability) perhaps need to be shared as part of a non – isolationist agenda which can benefit all local, regional and global communities as part of a global education effort.

What is important is that the changing nature of the role of schools is able to accommodate the new identities of the children within them. Kalantzis and Cope (2000) emphasize that children bring with them different life experiences from their different lifeworlds and as such they are oriented to school differently. Add to this the virtual lifeworlds in which children also exist then schools have to make National Education relevant in contemporary ways. In many respects this was emphasized in the speech made by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (17th May 1997). He suggested that the teaching of National Education was no easy task and that within the pedagogy of National Education students and teachers alike should become aware of current affairs

and as he said, be knowledgeable of what is happening in the world and in the Singapore region particularly those events which have an impact on Singapore. This is appropriate but perhaps limited because the young people of Singapore make the business of the world their business by 'networking' into it (Gee, 2000). This may indeed lead to an ultimate challenge to some of the principles of Governance. Not in any revolutionary sense but the potential for disagreement with government policy has never been greater and this possibly indicates that the multi-media communication available to young people may actually be a postmodern form of democracy (see Ho, Zaheer, Baber and Khondker, 2002). As a result National Education cannot simply be a set of historical facts (if there is such a thing in the postmodern world) or set of guiding principles by which Singaporeans will live their lives. National Education must connect with the lives of young people and the lives of young people are connected to a wider and an increasingly available number of communities or as Urry (2003) describes, networks that overlay each other. Hence National Education must connect to the country, the region and the world at large so that young Singaporeans get a sense of what the country has become since independence, where the country can go in terms of its further development as a Nation State and how it can be connected through its youth (rather than through financial institutions) to the global community. In this way National Education can perhaps make a more authentic contribution to the Nation's children on their terms. This is the challenge that lies ahead for both National Education and Singapore as a Nation State.

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